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SUBJECT: BRUNO'S LAST STAND -- FIRST WILD BEAR IN 170 YEARS
PROVES TOO WILD FOR BAVARIA

SUMMARY

¶1. Despite all the attention surrounding the World Cup, EADS' woes and health care reform, Bavarians and many Germans have been transfixed by a two-year-old brown bear named "Bruno" that wandered across international borders into Bavaria, a government minister's agenda, a hunter's crosshairs, and the hearts of millions. Following Bruno's government-sanctioned shooting, questions remain over the political fallout and the future of wild bears in the German Alps. The incident also offers a snippet of insight into German attitudes toward the environment. End Summary.

A VISITOR NAMED "BRUNO"

¶2. The bear, dubbed "Bruno" by the media, began his journey in Italy, where he was released as part of a program to reintroduce brown bears from Slovenia in the Alps. After wandering across the border from Austria, he was first sighted in Bavaria on May 20. As the first wild bear seen in Germany since 1835, Bruno was initially extended a warm public welcome by Bavarian Environment Minister Werner Schnappauf -- after all, Bruno could prove a boon for Bavaria's image just as visitors from around the world arrived for the World Cup.

THE "PROBLEM BEAR"

¶3. However, as Bavarian Interior Minister Beckstein has often emphasized, foreigners are only welcome in Bavaria provided they are willing to adapt to German culture and traditions. Bruno quickly wore out his welcome by raiding stables, killing sheep, chickens, and a child's pet rabbit. The Bavarian government declared Bruno "Ursus non Grata" and ordered that he be shot or captured. Vexed by Bruno's unchecked roaming across Bavaria -- he was even seen sitting on the steps of a police station eating a guinea pig -- Minister-President Edmund Stoiber took to referring to him as "the Problem Bear."

¶4. Nevertheless, Bruno appeared to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the public -- Schnappauf received some 1,300 letters and drawings from children all over Germany appealing for Bruno to be kept alive. Following criticism of the edict that Bruno be shot, Schnappauf gave the animal a stay of execution and, at a cost of over Euro 125,000, flew in a special trap from Colorado and a team of Finnish bear hunters with specially trained dogs. After the Finnish hunters failed at their task, Schnappauf reinstated the shoot-to-kill order effective June 26. Early in the morning of that same day, Bruno met his demise at the hands of an

(as yet) unnamed hunter. Bruno, stuffed, is to be put on display at a natural history museum in Munich's Nymphenburg Palace.

"MAY HIS URSINE SOUL REST IN PEACE"

15. Almost immediately, criticism of the Bavarian government started pouring in from across Bavaria and the world. Minister Schnappauf has received multiple death threats and calls for his resignation. State prosecutors have received nine legal complaints, several against Schnappauf, for alleged breaches of hunting and animal protection laws. Death threats have also been made against the hunter. Schnappauf has defended himself by saying that had Bruno attacked a human, calls for his resignation would be better justified. Future bears, he said, would be welcome in Bavaria, provided they behaved appropriately.

16. The "Bruno" saga has received a disproportional share of press play, including in the international media. The Munich tabloid "TZ," which has devoted no less than eleven cover pages to Bruno since May 21, published an obituary threatening revenge at the voting booth for Bruno's death, and called on people to send protest letters and e-mails to Minister-President Stoiber and Minister Schnappauf. Germany's major tabloid "Bild" even suggested a state funeral for Bruno might be appropriate. "Spiegel Online's" daily updated "Bruno Watch" included an obituary entitled "A Problem Bear or Bavaria's Problem?" and compared Bruno's death with that of Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, and Princess Diana. Mirroring the sentiment of the general public, the piece concluded: "For indeed Bruno was murdered, shot down in the prime of his young life, executed

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in cold blood. We should reflect now on whether we feel happy with what we have done. We share a collective guilt for Bruno's demise, our inability to co-exist with nature has yet again prompted us to reach for the trigger. Bruno is dead and we are all the poorer for it: May his ursine soul rest in peace."

COMMENT

17. Bruno has been the media's June flavor of the month. While the attention lavished on Bruno has taken nearly everyone by surprise, we expect the criticism leveled at Schnappauf and Stoiber to be relatively fleeting -- radical animal rights advocates who make death threats aren't generally considered the CSU's base anyway. Perhaps the greatest insight from the whole Bruno affair might be that despite the veneer of "greenness" extolled by German society, modern Germany in fact coexists uneasily with untamed nature. The contrast between the massive hunt for the first wild bear seen in Bavaria in over 170 years and the recent story of a clawless housecat treeing a bear in New Jersey couldn't be much more stark. True wilderness, even in mountainous Bavaria, hasn't really existed in Germany for generations -- nature is good, as long as it is controlled, channeled, and subdued. If the saga of Bavaria's "Problem Bear" is any indicator, the strategy of reintroducing wild bears to the Alps, at least the German Alps, may be doomed to failure -- that is, unless the bears are willing to cooperate by not being too wild.

18. This report has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

19. Previous reporting from Munich is available on our SIPRNET website at www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/munich/ .

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